

Story 2064 (Transcribed from his field tape by Ahmet Ali Arslan and used later in his unpublished dissertation.)

Narrator: Güneş Öztürk,
45, housewife

Location: Ardahan,
capital of
Ardahan
Province

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Love as Great as That for Salt

There was once a padishah who had three daughters. He loved his daughters dearly, but after awhile he began to wonder just how much they loved him. He decided to test them on this matter. He asked his oldest daughter, "How much do you love me?"

The oldest daughter answered, "Father, I love you as much as I love the gems that have been given to me."

When he asked his middle daughter this same question, she answered, "I love you, Father, as much as I do the baklava¹ made by our cook."

When the youngest daughter was asked how much she loved her father, she said, "Salt is the most precious of all things. I love my father as much as I love salt."

The padishah was very pleased with what his two

¹A very popular pastry in Turkey. It is made of many layers of very thin dough. After the dough has been baked honey is poured into the bottom of the baking pan. By wicking action the honey rises and permeates all of the now-crunchy dough.

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older daughters had said, but he was angered by the answer of his youngest daughter. He said to her, that is what you think of me, I shall give you more salt than you will ever be able to consume." He gave her a large bag of salt. Then he secretly ordered of his attendants to take the girl into the deep forest and abandon her there.

When the girl realized that she had been left alone in the forest, she began walking about aimlessly and crying steadily as she walked. After awhile she came to a small house in the forest and knocked on its door. When an old woman opened that door, the girl said, "Grandmother, I became lost while walking in the forest, and I have nobody to ask for help. May I stay with you for the night? Tomorrow I shall go and find some other place to stay."

The old woman felt very sorry for the girl and invited her to come inside. Noticing at once that the house was not well kept, the girl dusted it and cleaned it from one end to the other. She then cooked some soup for the old woman.

The owner of that house was very pleased with the

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behavior of her guest. She said to the girl, "You are a very pleasant person who is not reluctant to work. I do not have anyone in this world. Would you be willing to become my daughter? There is a bey² who has property nearby, and I tend his flock of sheep during his absence. He is gone most of the time, but he has a summer house here where he spends some time occasionally. He is my only contact with the rest of the world."

The youngest daughter of the padishah agreed to live with the old woman. She worked around the house, and every day she took the flock from the sheepfold to the pasture first and then later to the fountain for water. One day when she was about to take the sheep to the pasture, the bey arrived, attended by servants, to visit the old woman. He observed the padishah's youngest daughter. Although he did not know who she was, he felt that she was the most beautiful girl in the world. He asked the old woman,

²In Republican Turkey there are no beys. The term refers to a Turkish aristocrat of Ottoman, Seljuk, and pre-Seljuk times, and goes back to the 8th or 9th century--and perhaps earlier. The bey was a landed nobleman, sometimes wealthy and often politically powerful. In the 10th-century Book of Dede Korkut he was a tribal chief or one of his close associates. The Turkish bey was roughly equivalent to a British lord or baron.

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"Grandmother, who is that girl?"

"Who should she be?" asked the old woman. "She is my daughter."

"But you didn't have any daughter before, grandmother. Where did she come from?"

"What else should have occurred? My Allah felt sorry for me because in my old age I was living alone So Allah sent this beautiful girl to me."

Without any hesitation, the bey said, "Grandmother, I find your daughter very attractive. Would you be willing to give her to me in marriage?"

"I shall think about that," said the old woman. And she did give it serious consideration. To herself she said, "I doubt that I could give her in marriage to any better man than the bey. Before doing so, however, I should ask for her opinion on this matter." When the girl returned, the old woman spoke to her at once. "The man who arrived here just as you were leaving for the pasture is the bey who owns the flock. You must have seen him, for he saw you clearly enough to ask for your hand in marriage. Would you be willing to be married to him?" The girl accepted this proposal, and in a short

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time she and the bey were married.

Let us leave her with her husband now and return to her father at the palace. The padishah began to feel remorse for what he had done to his youngest daughter. He sent out a group of men to search for the girl and bring her back home again. These men searched at length everywhere without finding any trace of the girl. They finally concluded that she must have been devoured by wild animals in the forest.

The padishah announced a period of mourning for the loss of his youngest daughter. But when that public grieving had passed, the padishah continued his own private grieving. Even after years had passed, he could think of little else but his responsibility for her death. In hope of relieving himself somewhat from the guilt he felt, the padishah one day decided to take a long trip with some of his closest friends.

They went some way, and after quite awhile, they entered the part of the country where his daughter now lived. The bey welcomed the padishah with suitable ceremony. The youngest daughter recognized her father at once, but she did not reveal this fact. The ruler did not recognize his daughter, for it had now been many years

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since he had last seen her.

When the bey's wife was overseeing the preparation of dinner for that evening, she ordered the cook and her helpers not to put any salt in any of the food. When dinner was served, the padishah recognized at once that the food was tasteless because it lacked salt. He at once realized that he had abandoned his youngest daughter in the forest for nothing, and he burst into tears.

The bey asked, "What is the matter, my padishah? Why are you crying?"

The padishah responded, "Who but I should be crying? I once asked my three daughters how much they loved me. The two older girls gave answers that pleased me, but the youngest daughter said that she loved me as much as she loved salt. I was angered by that answer. I gave her a large bag of salt and, alas, had her abandoned in forest, where she may have been devoured by wild animals. I have never heard from her since then, but I could not help thinking of her when I tasted this saltless food. No matter how good food may be, it has no flavor without salt. The food here reminded me of my daughter's words, and it also reminded me of my unfairness to her."

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By that time the youngest daughter could no longer conceal her identity. She asked, "Father, could you not recognize me, your youngest daughter?" Crying, she rushed to her father and hugged him. It was several minutes before either of them could stop crying.

The padishah then invited that daughter and his son-in-law to come to the city and live after that in the palace. Before he died, the padishah bestowed his crown upon that son-in-law. They ate and drank and passed along their happy days to us